

HISTORY & FOLKLORE

Has Success Spoiled Bill Brett?

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would sneak up on outlaws in any way they knew how. The outlaws were tough and they had to be tougher. This Bonanza stuff is for kids.

“Zane Grey was good at description. He could describe landscapes in a way that you could see it yourself, but he constantly had the gunslingers in gunfights and showdowns and that’s just not the way it was. I’ve only been able to get through one L’Amour book. I like J. Frank Dobie and I’ve read everything he’s ever done. I also like Mark Twain, particularly ‘Letters From Earth’.”

Brett dropped out of the eighth grade (“They said I spent three months in the eighth grade, but I’ll be damned if I remember it,”) to work in the oil fields. Aside from his roughnecking, he drove a truck and worked as a farmer, deputy sheriff, rancher, ranch foreman, and cowhand in a time before there were fences to block one’s path. He recently retired from his position as postmaster of Hull. (“If I would have known retirement was going to be this good, I would have retired a long time ago.”)

“I didn’t do well in school. I didn’t like being inside all the time. I suppose if they would have had it under a tree somewhere, I probably would have stayed. They told me I quit once I had read every book in the library

“I started writing in 1954 and people saw it and said I should send it off. When the Texas A&M Press started up I decided to send it there. They now arrange a lot of radio and TV shows for me. I go mostly to help ‘em sell the book. I figure it’s the least I could do since they went to all the trouble to publish it.” He recently appeared on a segment of the “Ron Stone Show” on a Houston TV station. Toward the end of the show, Stone asked if he had any comments. Brett replied dryly, “Yes, I’m glad I did this show. I wanted to find out if there really was a Ron Stone.”

“I’ve got enough information now to write a book on razorback hogs. They were a very important commodity in their

day, the most important source of food around here. They got everything from them – soap, grease, cooking oil. You didn’t have vegetable oil then. The Conquistadors valued them more than their horses. The settlers used to drive them hundreds of miles to market. Next to the grizzly bear, the wild boar is probably the meanest animal on either the North or South American continent. They’ve got those tusks and they know how to use them.

“They’re very fast; you got to know how to handle ‘em. They bank together in a group to fight. I’ve known one man killed by ‘em, 10 horses hurt, some killed, and there’s no tellin’ how many dogs I’ve seen killed or wounded by hogs in the Big Thicket. I even heard of a black bear being killed by ‘em down here.

“Yeah, I’ll get started on that book one of these days. I guess the world won’t miss anything if I don’t. I won’t be missing any meals if I don’t write it. To answer your previous question, I would say the only thing that’s changed drastically in my life due to writing is some of the people I’ve been able to meet, people like John Henry Faulk. I never had the chance to meet writers, professors, and artists before and this gave me the chance. I’ve always had somewhat of an inferiority complex around these types of people. Someday I would like to go to college. It don’t matter what I study, maybe literature.”

At this, he got up to feed his horses. “I don’t miss riding much anymore. I had to stop after I got both knees butchered (operated on). It’s like the old fella said: It was fun while I was young, but that’s what made me old.”

We left him there to finish his chores. As he closed the wooden gate and fastened it with a clack, he said, “You bronchos come back anytime, just make yourself at home. If I’m not here, just come on in the front door. It won’t be locked.”

Yep, one would be pretty hard-pressed to say success has spoiled Bill Brett.



Deer hunting in Luce Bayou Woods in 1958. Back row: Bill Krull, Jerry Cherry, Ray White, Bill Owens, Tom White, Chester Anderson, Buddy Cherry, Bill Scott, John Ulkie, Jack Webb, Gene Berry. Front row: Judge Penman Mathews, Billy Wilkey, Bill Wilkey, Bill Williford, Bob Krull. – Photo courtesy Jerry and Linda Cherry



Early 1900s in downtown Dayton. Randolph Patton, deputy sheriff; Gus White; Ross Sterling. – Photo courtesy Jerry and Linda Cherry



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1956 Bicentennial Celebration in Liberty. Left to right: Joe Krull, Bill Scott, Jerry Cherry, Bob Krull, Bill Krull, Coley “Red” Wright. – Photo courtesy Jerry and Linda Cherry

One more photo from Jerry and Linda Cherry’s collection on next page.